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ABSTRACT

Sixteen directors of exceptional education programs, 10 supervisors of specific learning disability (SLD) programs, and 101 principals having SLD classes responded to a 14-question survey regarding the identification and placement of SLD students in Florida. Among findings were that principals were the most outspoken in what they considered charactistics of SLD students; that five traits (including persistent word, syllable, and letter reversals) were rated by all three groups as characteristic of SLD students; that most respondents felt that state guidelines were adequate for eligibility criteria; that directors and supervisors recommended higher prevalence rates than the existing 1-2%; that many respondents expressed a need for self contained classes for SLD students; and that socioeconomic or cultural background of the pupil was considered to be the factor most frequently influencing differential placement in a borderline case. Appended are excerpts from state guidelines regarding classification and placement. (CL)

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IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT PROCEDURES USED IN FLORIDA SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES PROGRAMS

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT PROCEDURES USED IN FLORIDA SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES PROGRAMS

by

Patricia Silke Taylor, Ed. D.

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FOREWORD

There is currently a great deal of interest and publicity given to the specific learning disability (SLD) area. In 1975 public attention was focused on SLD problems in a nationally televised program followed by educators in their local community discussing what their program was doing.

The purpose of this FERDC bulletin is to report a study of how directors of special education programs, SLD supervisors, and elementary principals in 21 Florida school districts responded to the following question:

> How are children with specific learning disabilities identified, evaluated, and placed in your school district?

We feel the information Patricia Taylor reports in this study makes an important contribution to our understanding of what people who are responsible for the daily implementation of the SLD program are thinking and doing.

On behalf of FERDC, I congratulate Patricia Taylor on an important study well done.

W. F. Breivogel, Ed. D.
Executive Director, FERDC

Winter, 1976-77

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD i

PREFACE TO THE READER ii

INTRODUCTION 1

THE PROBLEM 5

PROCEDURES AND DATA ANALYSIS 8

- Sample 8
- Instrumentation 9
- Data Collection 10
- Analysis of Data 10

RESULTS 11

- Characteristics 12
- Referral 13
- Eligibility Criteria 13
- Prevalence 14
- Psychologists' Influence 14
- Tests 15
- Self-Contained Placement 16
- Differential Placement 17
- Resource Rooms 18
- Full Time Equivalent Funding 18

RESULTS IN BRIEF 20

CONCLUSIONS 26

REFERENCES 28

APPENDICES 30

PREFACE TO THE READER

Public Law 94-142, the Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, is a civil rights act which calls for a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children (FAPE). In order to receive federal funding, local and state educational agencies must demonstrate to the federal commissioner of education that each has a policy that all handicapped children have the right to FAPE.

Funding priorities will assure FAPE to handicapped children who are unserved and to severely handicapped children who are inadequately served. Two percent of the 12% of the school population which may be counted as handicapped for funding purposes may be children with specific learning disabilities.

These learning disabled children, as well as those severely handicapped children, are guaranteed by law, certain procedural safeguards which include (a) the right of parents or guardians to examine the pupil's records, and their right to an independent evaluation of their child; (b) prior notice before the change from regular to special education is initiated, and (c) the opportunity to present complaints if there is disagreement with the recommended placement.

A due process hearing is also guaranteed to the parents or guardians if the special education placement is contested. Children may no longer be placed in special education classes as a result of an evaluation which has used a single instrument for measuring

intelligence. Handicapped children must have an individualized educational program which is related to a thorough evaluation, and which requires a written statement developed by a committee of a specialist in the field of special education, such as the supervisor of the respective program, the school principal, the child's teachers, the evaluation personnel, and the parents. Wherever possible, the child should be included in the planning of the individualized educational plan.

The individual educational plan for each child should include (a) the present level of educational performance; (b) goals and short-term objectives; (c) specific services to be provided; (d) starting date and expected duration of services, and (e) evaluative criteria regarding the achievement of objectives.

The Act provides for a mechanism which monitors the child's progress in special education placement. His progress must be evaluated two times during the first year, and annually thereafter.

Although this study was completed before the passage of PL 94-142, it serves as a preliminary effort in seeking information relative to how children with specific learning disabilites, (SLD) are identified, evaluated, and placed in twenty-one Florida school districts as reported by directors of special education programs, SLD supervisors, and elementary education principals having SLD classes in their schools.

The guidelines for the identification of pupils with specific learning disabilities which were in use at the time of this study,

(District Procedures, 1975) are now being rewritten (See Appendix B). Mr. Dennis Ehrhardt, Florida State Consultant in the area of specific learning disabilities, provided the leadership for the development of these guidelines, and was responsible for a proposal in which Title VI funds were requested for the purpose of convening a special study institute to determine statewide program needs and directions in the area of specific learning disabilities. One of the objectives of this institute was to develop statewide criteria for the screening, referral, identification, and staffing of SLD children (Special Study Institute, 1975). The criteria which evolved, or were refined from the original guidelines are to be incorporated into a new set of guidelines which will be submitted in accordance with the Florida Statute 120 of the Administrative Procedures Act, for hopeful inclusion in the state's regulations for the 1977-78 school year (Ehrhardt, 1976).

INTRODUCTION

Because of differing perceptions regarding the characteristics of SLD pupils, different standards exist for the identification of these pupils, and for their placement in SLD classes. Cruickshank (1972) noted that the field of specific learning disabilities was at a point in its growth where assessment of all of its components should be undertaken. He considered the field to be at its most critical phase because it could not continue to grow as it has in the past without expecting failure in the form of professional frustrations, political hostility, and parental antagonism.

Divoky (1974) expressed alarm at the rate at which the SLD field is growing. Teacher training programs, regional and national conferences, journals, books, organizations for teachers and parents, and treatment centers have proliferated.

Myers (1974), in her president's message in the DCLD newsletter, wrote that the most serious problem confronting individuals in the areas of specific learning disabilities was that of not being able to define operationally what is meant by a "specific learning disability." She asked whether individuals were any closer to such a definition than they were five years ago, and questioned the likelihood of adequate identification of pupils without operationalizing the definition. Myers pointed out that when operations are not stated, there can be little reliable

identification of the population, nor can valid conclusions be reached regarding the prevention and remediation of specific learning disabilities.

Cruickshank (1972) examined issues which he considered to be threats to the appropriate development of the field of specific learning disabilities. He too mentioned the failure to define operationally the term "learning disability." He also mentioned the lack of qualified college professors; the lack of properly trained teachers and quality programs for children; the lack of parent involvement, and the threat of class action suits. Court actions taken in such cases as Hobson vs. Hansen (1967) and Spangler vs. Pasadena City Board of Education (1970) were pertinent to the education of pupils with specific learning disabilities because they challenged three aspects of special education applicable to the SLD field (Cruickshank, 1972). The three aspects to which Cruickshank referred were educational placement and labeling, "psychodiagnosis," and parental involvement in the educational process. The plaintiffs in these cases were dissatisfied with the schools and stated that the psychologists and educators had violated the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and had deprived citizens of the equal protection clause under the laws.

Judge J. Skelly Wright handed down the opinion in Hobson vs. Hansen (1967) which abolished the track system in Washington, D.C. Most of the children in special education classes as well as many disadvantaged children, had been placed in the lowest track. In

Spangler vs. Pasadena City Board of Education (1970), the court also spoke to the issue of placement of pupils in ability groups and urged that the grouping policies of the districts be carefully examined. In the Hobson case, the courts agreed with the plaintiffs that the public school personnel who administered the tests used for ability grouping had not been adequately trained for that purpose.

Larry P. vs. Riles (1972) was a leading proceeding in which the plaintiffs sought a preliminary injunction which would restrain the San Francisco school district from administering I.Q. tests for the purpose of determining placement of black pupils in classes for the educable retarded. District Judge Peckham indicated that in the view of the court, irreparable harm takes place when pupils are wrongfully placed in EMR classes. He questioned whether some pupils, including the plaintiffs in this case, were wrongfully placed in such classes, in violation of their constitutional rights (Collings & Singletary, 1973).

Cruickshank (1972) warned that legal cases directed at the education for the retarded were very relevant to children with specific learning disabilities. Until the needs of children labeled learning disabled are met, the professionals in the field are vulnerable to the growing demands for accountability.

Divoky (1974) warned educators against making a commitment to the expansion of SLD programs and facilities until the following questions can be answered: (a) How reliable are our diagnostic tools and screening methods, and how applicable are their results?;

(b) Are the characteristics of learning disabled children unique to this group, or do successful students have at least some disabilities?; (c) Are current methods of treatment and remediation valid?

The Florida State Board of Education has adopted the 1968 definition of specific learning disabilities which was formulated by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children:

> Specific Learning Disabilities: a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in a spoken and written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They include conditions which have been referred to as perceptual handicap, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental asphasia, etc.. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or to an environmental disadvantage. (District Procedures, 1974, p. 58)

This definition was accepted by a majority of the States. It is the definition explicitly stated in P.L. 91-230 which was enacted on April 18, 1970. The wide use of this definition did not imply sanction by special educators, psychologists, or special education directors. Vaughn and Hodges (1973) explained the wide acceptance of this definition by stating that federal funds have been contingent upon its use.

The Florida Bureau of Education for Exceptional Students (District Procedures, 1975) offered suggestions for operationalizing the definition of specific learning disabilities (See Appendix A). In support of the development of the operationalized definition,

the Bureau cited the conflicting prevalence rates of pupils said to have specific learning disabilities. Rates of up to 20% of the general school population have been reported (Gilmore, 1975, pp. 14-22).

The operationalized definition developed by the Florida Bureau of Education for Exceptional Students, through the direction of Mr. Dennis Ehrhardt, state consultant in learning disabilities, was not imposed upon all districts. The Bureau provided guidelines for the placement of pupils in special programs and acknowledged the freedom of individual districts to define their own procedures in accord with the definitions of exceptionality areas as accepted by each district, and in accord with state-mandated due process procedures:

> Districts are given great flexibility in designing and implementing programs. There are no statutes or regulations requiring or limiting organization of programs for the various exceptionalities. (District Procedures, 1974, p. 3)

The Problem

Varying standards exist as to what constitutes a specific learning disability. A pupil identified as having a specific learning disability in one district may be denied entrance to a SLD program in another district. Who is the SLD pupil being served in Florida, and why and how is he identified and placed in a SLD program?

Answers to these and related questions were sought from professionals having the authority to direct and/or influence the

direction of their districts' SLD programs. The 14 questions listed below were designed to elicit information concerning selected aspects of SLD programs, as well as information regarding the identification and placement procedures used in Florida SLD programs.

1. What are the learning characteristics of SLD pupils as perceived by directors of exceptional education programs, supervisors of SLD programs, and elementary school principals, and what are the main reasons for referral?
2. In the opinions of the directors, principals, and SLD supervisors, are the perceived characteristics of the SLD pupils accounted for, or reflected in their districts' eligibility criteria?
3. What are the opinions of directors and supervisors regarding the state-recommended 1-2% prevalence rate for pupils with specific learning disabilities?
4. What are the steps leading to placement and who are the participating professionals?
5. What are the perceptions of directors, supervisors, and principals regarding the influence these professionals have in determining placement?
6. What tests and/or evaluations are used for identification purposes, by whom are they administered, and how is their usefulness perceived by SLD supervisors?

7. What are the attitudes of directors and principals regarding their influence in the hiring of SLD teachers?
8. What factors influence differential programming when a a district has both self-contained and resource classes?
9. What happens to pupils who are referred for SLD evaluations but who do not meet the eligibility criteria?
10. What provisions are made for pupils who leave self-contained classes because they require a less intense program?
11. What are the opinions of directors, supervisors, and principals regarding Full Time Equivalent funding and its effects on SLD programs if any?
12. What are the attitudes of directors, supervisors, and principals regarding the kinds of pupils referred to resource classes? Is the placement appropriate for most of them?
13. What are the attitudes of principals toward accepting pupils from other in-district schools for their resource classes?
14. Is there a relationship between district size and the responses?

Procedures and Data Analysis

A descriptive survey approach was used for this research. Questionnaires designed to obtain data relative to the above questions were constructed. Each group of respondents (directors, supervisors, and principals) had its own questionnaire in order to minimize the length and to make each type of questionnaire as relevant as possible.

A pilot study was undertaken for the purpose of insuring appropriate content and format in the questionnaires. The pilot study took the form of personal interviews with six directors of exceptional education programs, five SLD supervisors, and 12 principals. These individuals represented large, medium, and small school districts. After the questionnaires were revised in accordance with the results of the pilot study, they were mailed to the persons described in the sample.

Sample

School districts were chosen according to the size of their school populations. All of Florida's seven large districts (30,000 and over) were chosen. Seven of the eight districts classified as medium (18,000-30,000) were chosen. Seven small districts (below 18,000) were selected. Small districts were chosen which had at least six SLD classes, and priority was given to those districts which also had SLD supervisors.

All of the 21 directors and all SLD supervisors of these districts were included in the sample. Seven principals having SLD classes were randomly selected from each district. One district had only six SLD classes. All of the principals in this district were included in the sample

It should be remembered that at the school district level there was only one director of special education who worked with many elementary education principals. Likewise when there was a SLD supervisor, there was only one at a district level. The composition of the roles of the respondents reflected the distribution of these roles at the school district level, and hence there were fewer special education personnel than general education personnel among the respondents.

	Included in Sample	Responded
Directors of exceptional education programs:	21	16
Supervisors of SLD programs:	13	10
Principals having SLD classes:	147	101

Instrumentation

By completing the questionnaires which had been revised in accordance with the results of the field test, the respondents provided the information which answered the questions presented. The first section of the questionnaires dealt with the perceived characteristics of pupils having specific learning disabilities. Two publications (Bryan & McGrady, 1972; Clements, 1966) served as resources to the development of this section. In addition to

the characteristics listed by these writers, other items were included in the questionnaires which were suggested by the findings of the pilot study as well as by the investigator's own experience.

Many of the same questions were asked of all three groups as in that part of the questionnaire regarding the perceived characteristics of SLD pupils. Some questions in later sections of the questionnaires were asked of all groups, or of one or two groups of respondents as appropriate. For example, supervisors were asked what tests and evaluations were used to identify pupils with specific learning disabilities. Supervisors were also asked to judge the usefulness of these tests. Directors and principals were asked about their roles in hiring the SLD teacher and about their impressions regarding the influence principals have in determining SLD placement.

Data Collection

An introductory letter accompanied the questionnaires. The individuals who did not respond by May 21, 1975 were contacted by a follow-up letter. Those individuals who did not respond to the follow up letter were telephoned in order to increase the percentage of responses as well as to find out why they were not responding.

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics were used in order to analyze the data relative to the questions stated. These statistics were expressed

in terms of frequency of response and percents. The "Freq Procedure" from the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was used (Service, 1972, p. 216). Information from directors, supervisors and principals was compared in order to find agreement or differences, if any, among the groups. Agreement or differences were also observed (where appropriate) among the groups from large, medium, and small districts.

Results

Due to the wide scope of this study, some of the findings will be reported at the end of this section in brief form only. The supportive statistical data for each question asked of the respondents in their respective questionnaires, may be secured from the writer.

Directors, supervisors, and principals appeared to be more concerned with academic functioning than they were with isolated perceptual, language, or motor characteristics when identifying the SLD pupil. Dunn (1973) mentioned the problems with the USOE definition which the state of Florida had accepted. He feared that the definition referred to a "miscellaneous" group of children and conditions rather than to a classical syndrome or common characteristic. An analysis of the responses from supervisors indicated that the pupil with a specific learning disability was perceived as having a condition in which no learning trait is characteristic unless it was accompanied by other traits.

Characteristics

Principals were the most outspoken in what they considered the characteristics of SLD pupils to be. They tended to describe certain traits as being always characteristic, or a very good indication that a learning disability exists. Directors and especially supervisors were more cautious in naming certain traits as being always a characteristic, or very characteristic of the SLD pupil.

Dunn (1968) alerted special educators to the dangers of inaccurate placement of students in special education classes. His argument was that past practices had as their major justification, the removal of pressures on regular teachers and pupils. Dunn's concern may still be a problem today. Principals may describe certain traits as being very characteristic of the SLD pupil because of a tendency to want to remove the pressures on regular teachers who have pupils with learning problems in their classes as well as being desirous of more individual help for these pupils.

Although directors, supervisors, and principals weighed the traits differently, there was agreement among the groups that the following traits were characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) persistent reversals of words, syllables, or letters in reading and writing; (b) difficulty in organizing space; (c) poor visual discrimination; (d) poor memory for visual sequencing; and (e) difficulty in following directions, understanding class discussion, or retaining auditory information. Few of the respondents, however, perceived hyperactivity, emotional problems, or general coordination deficits to be associated with SLD pupils.

Referral

Regarding reasons for referral to SLD programs, the respondents reported that pupils were usually referred to SLD programs because they demonstrated a significant discrepancy between achievement and potential, and an uneven pattern of achievement in academic subjects. These descriptors were considered to be always characteristic of SLD pupils by directors, supervisors and principals.

Eligibility Criteria

Most of the districts were using the guidelines designed by the Florida Bureau for Education of Exceptional Children for the identification of pupils with specific learning disabilities (District Procedures, 1975). These guidelines were formulated because of problems with the 1968 USOE definition which the state of Florida accepted. One of the problems with the definition according to Dunn (1973), was its lack of restrictions regarding the severity of the learning disability for placement purposes. The Florida guidelines were developed in order to operationalize the definition of the National Advisory Committee and to make SLD eligibility more objective.

Although many professionals reported that the Florida SLD guidelines needed more clarification, most agreed that the criteria used in the definition were adequate at this time. Apparently, the respondents have found the elgibility criteria suggested in the guidelines to be consistent with their own opinions regarding the pupil with specific learning disabilities. The agreement of

the respondents regarding the acceptance of the eligibility criteria should lead to similar standards for identification and placement procedures throughout Florida school districts. It is important to realize that the eligibility criteria used in the Florida guidelines depend upon adequate evaluations of the pupils to be placed in SLD classes. Without sufficient and adequately trained teachers, it will be impossible for districts to adhere to the eligibility criteria for SLD placement.

Prevalence

Administratively, it is important to note that 43% of the directors and 33% of the supervisors reported that their districts had a greater prevalence rate than the state-recommended rate of 1-2%. Seventy-one percent of the directors and 80% of the supervisors wanted the state-recommended rate to be increased. Prevalence rates from 3-5% were recommended by directors and supervisors. According to the opinions of Florida directors and supervisors, many pupils will not be served if the state of Florida adheres to a 1-2% prevalence rate. If the rate were to be increased, there would be a need for more qualified SLD teachers, more university training opportunities for SLD teachers, and resource classes in every school so that schools which have previously not had their own resource classes would be able to accommodate their own pupils.

Psychologists' Influence

Thirty-one percent of the directors and 21% of the principals reported that they were not satisfied with psychologists' influence in determining SLD placement. Supervisors reported their dissatisfaction by expressing the opinion that I.Q. tests were not

sufficient for the purpose of making recommendations for SLD programs, and that the evaluations of SLD teachers were equally important to such a recommendation. Attitudes of supervisors, directors, and principals which expressed the opinion that the psychologist had too much influence, may change as the districts have more experience with eligibility criteria for placement, and as the SLD teacher assumes more responsibility for testing. It should be remembered that until recently tests administered by psychologists were often the only tests used to determine SLD placement.

Tests

The tests which were most often used for SLD identification, and which were sometimes required for placement, in order of usage were: The Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude (Baker, 1935); The Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (McCarthy & Kirk, 1961); The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Wechsler, 1974); The Wide Range Achievement Test (Jastak & Jastak, 1965); The Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test (Bender, 1945); The Peabody Individual Achievement Test (Dunn & Markwardt, 1970); and The Key Mathematics Diagnostic Test (Connolly, Nachtman, & Pritchett, 1971).

Cruickshank (1972) warned special educators that SLD programs should not continue to expand until the professionals responsible for educating SLD pupils have been adequately trained. Since SLD teachers were doing most of the assessment of pupils, with the exception of psychological tests, it is essential that they be

adequately prepared to administer educational tests either in their university training, or through supervised in-service training. Directors and principals expressed the opinion that the SLD teacher is very influential in determining SLD placement. The training of SLD teachers or other diagnosticians should carefully prepare them for the responsibilities they will have in identification and placement.

Self-Contained Placement

Although there were no objective criteria used for placing pupils in self-contained classes when resource classes were also available, it was learned that pupils were more likely to be placed in a self-contained class than in a resource class if they (a) had a serious language disorder; (b) needed help in most academic areas; (c) were very young (first or second grade) or (d) had emotional problems. Directors, supervisors, and principals reported that self-contained placement was most influenced by the second factor, i.e. the need for assistance in most academic areas.

Most of the respondents agreed that resource room programming was ideal for most SLD pupils, however 50% of the directors, 51% of the principals, and 30% of the supervisors not having self-contained classes in their districts, wanted them to be added to their programs. This expression of need for self-contained classes was of interest since special educators are in a period characterized by a thrust toward mainstreaming. According to the opinions of many of the professionals involved in SLD placement, there is still a definite need for self-contained classes.

Differential Placement

Sometimes it is difficult to make a decision regarding placement because a pupil does not clearly fit the criteria for SLD placement or the criteria for other special education placement. In some instances, a class for the educable retarded, or the emotionally disturbed might be also considered in a staffing. This is true even though the administrators only sometimes associated emotional disturbance with a specific learning disability. Under these circumstances, the following informal criteria may help to determine SLD placement according to the opinions of directors, supervisors, and principals: (a) parental preference for SLD placement; (b) the socio-economic or cultural background of the pupil, i.e., the pupil may test low on standardized tests because of test bias; (c) preference for a resource program when other special education classes are self-contained, and (d) the lack of stigma associated with SLD placement.

The socio-economic or cultural background of the pupil was considered to be the factor which most often influenced differential placement when a case was considered to be borderline. Professionals may be questioning their previous concepts regarding intelligence and may be recognizing intellectual aptitudes which may be culturally determined. Although special educators and general educators may realize the injustice of placing culturally different pupils in classes for the educable retarded, they may feel justified in placing these same pupils in self-contained SLD

classes. Dunn (1968) wrote that a better alternative to special class placement is needed for socio-culturally different children with mild learning problems, and recommended that one or more resource teachers be available at every school to work with these children.

Resource Rooms

It is essential that adequate requirements be met for resource room placement to be effective. The use of resource rooms is consistent with the concept of mainstreaming because resource rooms permit a pupil to remain with his peers for most of the school day. Directors, principals, and supervisors agreed that the following factors helped to make resource room placement effective for pupils with specific learning disabilities: (a) when the pupil needs help in only one or two academic areas; (b) when the pupil can work independently in the regular class; (c) when the regular classroom teacher was understanding of the pupil's learning problems; (d) when the pupil mixed well with his peers in the regular classroom; (e) when regular classroom phasing in certain academic subjects was easily accomplished; (f) when the school principal was cooperative; and (g) when the resource room was in the same school as the pupil. Awareness of the requirements for effective resource room placement will enable participating professionals to make administrative and program changes based on these requirements.

FTE Funding

In the opinions of directors, principals and supervisors, FTE funding was causing definite problems for SLD programs in Florida,

and particularly in small districts. The respondents agreed that FTE funding (a) discouraged consultation between the SLD teacher and the regular classroom teacher; (b) detracted from conscientious evaluations of pupils before placement is made; (c) encouraged a pupil-teacher ratio which is too great, and (d) inhibited the establishment of SLD classes in rural and/or small schools where fewer children are identified. An analysis of the data showed that respondents from small districts reported more problems with FTE funding than did the respondents from medium and large districts.

Many principals expressed the concern that FTE funding encouraged over-crowded SLD classes. The alternative to overcrowded classes requires that SLD teachers work with more groups of children, having fewer children in each group. If the SLD teacher sees more groups of children each day she has almost no time for consultation with the regular classroom teacher. Effective mainstreaming necessitates communication between the special teacher and the classroom teacher. Mainstreaming may be weakened by a funding system which allocates money to a school on the basis of the number of instructional contact hours a pupil has in a special education class.

A supervisor wrote that FTE funding did not adequately support the SLD teacher with equipment and materials. This supervisor also reported that FTE funding adversely affected instructional grouping. By adverse effects of FTE funding on instructional groupings, this supervisor implied that teachers were expected to work with groups which were too large to facilitate remediation.

Another supervisor was concerned with the numbers of pupils on waiting lists for SLD classes. This supervisor considered the waiting lists to be illegal in light of mandatory legislation for exceptional pupils. The supervisor believed that the waiting lists were partially caused by a funding system which uses a previous year's spending to determine the financial outlay for the next year. There is an apparent contradiction between mandatory legislation for exceptional students and funding based on a previous year's spending.

Results in Brief

1. Principals were more likely to use the extreme codes of one and two (always a characteristic, or a good indication that a learning disability exists), than were directors and supervisors. Supervisors were very reluctant to use these codes with certain exceptions which occurred in the ratings of the main reasons for referral. Directors, supervisors, and principals agreed upon some of the characteristics which they perceived as being descriptive of SLD pupils. Those traits considered to be most characteristic of SLD pupils are named below in their order of importance to each group of respondents.

   a. Directors

      Directors found the following traits or conditions to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) significant discrepancy between achievement and potential as measured by standardized tests; (b) uneven pattern of achievement; (c) persistent reversals of words, syllables or letters in reading and writing; (d) inability to function in the regular classroom without special help; (e) difficulty in organizing space; and (f) poor visual discrimination.

   b. Supervisors

      Supervisors found the following traits or conditions to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) significant discrepancy between achievement and potential as measured by standardized tests; (b) uneven pattern of achievement; (c) persistent reversals; (d) inability to function in the classroom without special help; (e) difficulty organizing space; and (f) poor time concepts.

c. Principals

Principals found the following traits or conditions to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) significant discrepancy between achievement and potential as measured by standardized tests; (b) inability to function in the regular classroom without special help; (c) uneven pattern of achievement; (d) persistent reversals; (e) difficulty in organizing space; and (f) difficulty in following directions, understanding class discussions, or retaining auditory information.

2. When the perceived characteristics were analyzed without considering the main reasons for referral, the following characteristics were named in order of importance to the respondents:

a. Directors

Directors found the following traits to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) persistent reversals of words, syllables, or letters in reading and writing; (b) difficulty in organizing space; (c) poor visual discrimination; (d) poor auditory discrimination; (e) difficulty in following directions, understanding class discussions, or retaining auditory information, and poor memory for visual sequencing.

b. Supervisors

Supervisors found the following traits to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) persistent reversals; (b) difficulty organizing space; (c) poor time concepts; (d) inappropriate responses in young children; (e) poor memory for visual sequencing; and (f) difficulty in attending to assigned tasks.

c. Principals

Principals found the following traits to be the most characteristic of SLD pupils: (a) difficulty in following directions; (b) persistent reversals; (c) difficulty organizing space; (d) poor visual discrimination; (e) poor memory for visual sequencing; and (f) poor memory for words or for individual sounds in words.

3. Most respondents did not include traits which connote emotional problems as characteristic of SLD pupils, i.e., "emotionally unpredictable," or "not socially accepted by peers."

4. Principals gave more importance to motor problems as being characteristic of SLD pupils than did directors or supervisors who rarely used the extreme codes for this item.

5. All three groups agreed upon the reasons most often used for referring pupils to SLD programs, i.e., inability to function in the regular classroom without special help; significant discrepancy between achievement and potential; and uneven pattern of achievement. Disruptive classroom behavior was not one of the reasons.

6. When the data were analyzed by district size it was found that principals from small and medium districts preferred codes two and three to describe the learning traits. Principals from large districts preferred code one.

7. Directors, supervisors and principals agreed that their districts' eligibility criteria were adequate. Many directors, however, reported that the criteria were too comprehensive.

8. Forty-three percent of the directors and 33% of the supervisors reported that their districts had a greater prevalence rate than the state-recommended rate of 1-2%.

9. Seventy-one percent of the directors and 80% of the supervisors reported that the SLD prevalence rate for Florida should be increased.

10. Directors and supervisors recommended new prevalence rates from 3-5%.

11. SLD teachers have more responsibilities for testing in large districts than they have in small districts and medium districts and they work with the pupil earlier in the placement process.

12. Although the basic placement process is similar in all district categories, there are many steps which vary considerably within each category.

13. Notification of dismissal is placed in the pupil's records in 60% of the districts.

14. In 80% of the districts, the decision to dismiss a pupil from the SLD program was based upon a team staffing in which retest information was considered.

15. Directors and supervisors ranked the SLD supervisor as having contributed the most guidance and direction to their districts' SLD programs. Fifty-two percent of the principals agreed.

16. Directors ranked the SLD teacher as having the most influence in determining SLD placement. Supervisors ranked themselves as having the most influence in determining SLD placement. Principals reported that the psychologists had the most influence in determining SLD placement, followed by the SLD teacher.

17. Principals reported that they have sufficient influence in determining SLD placement. Directors agreed that the principals have sufficient influence in determining SLD placement. Thirteen percent reported that the principal has too much influence.

18. Thirty-one percent of the directors reported that they were not satisfied with the influence of the school psychologist in determining SLD placement. Twenty-one percent of the principals reported that they were not satisfied with the psychologist's influence.

19. Forty-four percent of those supervisors dissatisfied with the psychologist's influence reported that although an individual intelligence test is appropriate or required, the information it renders is insufficient for a SLD recommendation.

20. Forty-four percent of these supervisors reported that "in most instances the evaluation of SLD teachers are more pertinent to the question of SLD placement and should be considered on at least an equal level with that of the school psychologist's recommendation."

21. The tests and/or evaluations which are most often used for SLD identification and sometimes required for placement in order of usage are: (1) The Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude; (2) The Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities; (3) The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; (4) The Wide Range Achievement Test; (5) Bender-Gestalt Test; (6) The Peabody Individual Achievement Test; and (7) The Key Mathematics Diagnostic Test.

22. Directors and principals reported that they had sufficient input in the hiring of the SLD teacher.

23. Directors, supervisors and principals agreed that the listed circumstances in the questionnaire did influence self-contained placement over resource placement. All three groups found the self-contained placement was influenced the most by the second

factor, (the pupil needs help in most areas, i.e., a wide discrepancy exists between academic achievement and scores on standardized intelligence tests).

24. All three groups agreed that the listed factors influenced SLD placement when a case is borderline. There was most agreement, however, with the factor describing test bias caused by the socio-economic or cultural background of the pupils. Eighty percent of directors, 90% of supervisors and 85% of principals reported this factor as being very influential.

25. Fifty percent of the directors not having self-contained SLD classes in their districts, 51% of the principals, and 30% of the supervisors wanted to add self-contained classes to their districts' programs.

26. Directors, supervisors and principals whose districts already have self-contained classes, and those desiring that such classes be added reported that there are some pupils who because of their serious learning problems simply need a full-time SLD program.

27. All three groups agreed that the listed circumstances in the questionnaire served to make resource placement ideal for certain pupils.

28. Seventy-three percent of directors and 60% of supervisors reported that a pupil may be placed in another special education program such as a class for the educable retarded or emotionally disturbed if he did not meet SLD eligibility criteria.

29. Thirty-three percent of directors and 40% of supervisors reported that that if a pupil did not meet SLD eligibility criteria he would most likely remain in the regular classroom without special assistance.

30. Directors, supervisors and principals agreed that assistance to the pupil through consultant services to the regular classroom teacher, when the pupil did not meet eligibility criteria, was only a possibility.

31. Other special education placement, or assistance through consultant services to the regular classroom teacher is more likely in large and medium districts than it is in small districts when a pupil does not meet SLD eligibility criteria.

32. Forty-two percent of directors, 40% of supervisors, and 31% of principals reported that pupils leaving self-contained classes were most likely to attend SLD resource rooms when they required a less intense program.

33. Thirty percent of supervisors and 26% of principals reported that the pupil returns full-time to a regular class without special provisions when he leaves the SLD self-contained class.

34. There are more educational alternatives for pupils leaving self-contained SLD classes in large and medium districts than there are in small districts when a pupil requires a less intense program.

35. Fifty percent of directors, 63% of supervisors and 29% of principals reported that FTE funding poses definite problems for SLD programs.

36. Principals from small districts have more problems with FTE funding than do principals from medium and large districts.

37. Although 50% of the directors, 67% of the supervisors and 59% of the principals reported that SLD resource rooms essentially meet the academic and social needs of the pupils, 93% of the directors and 69% of the principals sometimes had the opinion that many of the SLD pupils had problems which are too great for the resource teacher to ameliorate. Only 20% of the supervisors agreed with this position.

38. Forty-two percent of the principals reported that there was no problem in accepting pupils from other in-district schools for their resource rooms. Twenty principals (24.7%), however, reported that transporting pupils to their schools for SLD placement was not beneficial to the students, and that they should be served within their own schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The intent of P.L. 94-142 is to provide a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children. The law states that a pupil who has learning handicaps must receive this education in the "least restrictive environment." Wherever possible, a pupil must remain in a regular class and be provided with any special resource services which are required for his or her appropriate education.

The determination of what is an appropriate education depends upon a conscientious evaluation of a pupil by skilled examiners and diagnosticians. The identification of pupils for SLD programs depends upon which eligibility criteria are used before a pupil is identified as having a specific learning disability.

The SLD eligibility criteria used in Florida school districts should continue to be used and clarified in order to standardize identification and placement procedures. Although there is still some question as to the reliability of the assessment tools used to determine eligibility (Divoky, 1974), their use can be made more beneficial if they are supplemented with the analysis of behavioral characteristics as described by Hallahan and Cruickshank (1973) who stressed the point that the behavior of the child should dictate the methods and materials teachers used with them.

The Florida 1-2% prevalence rate for SLD pupils should be increased to at least 3% in order to coincide with the existing prevalence rates as reported by the directors and supervisors in

this study. An increase of the prevalence rate to 3% would still be in agreement with the suggested rate of 1-3% made by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children (1968). It should be noted that the 2% figure for SLD children used in PL 94-142 may be changed to a higher figure depending upon prevalence rates found in the nation and to be reported by a committee within the next year.

The training of SLD teachers should prepare them to assume responsibilities in testing, as well as insure their competency in instructional techniques. Teachers who have not been trained to administer educational tests in their university preparation, should be trained to give them in supervised workshops. If the SLD teacher is trained to administer educational tests for assessment purposes, she is in a better position to serve as a consultant to other in-school personnel.

More properly trained SLD teachers and resource rooms should be provided in order to accommodate those pupils who are on waiting lists for SLD placement in Florida school districts. Ideally resource rooms should be in every school. This study indicated that many principals believed that pupils with specific learning disabilities should receive resource services in their own schools. Educational opportunities for SLD pupils would be more equitable if resource rooms were available in every school.

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APPENDIX A

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF A STUDENT WITH A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY*

1. Exclusion factor - child does not have a learning problem due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or an environmental disadvantage.

2. Academic disorder - child has a disorder in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic.

3. Process disorder - child has disorder in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language.

One step in operationalizing is to quantify what is meant by disorder. What degree constitutes a disorder as measured by the standard instruments used for identification?

The following are examples of operational criteria which include the exclusion factors, the academic disorder, and the disorder in a basic psychological process. Each area must have criteria and a child must meet all criteria in order to be identified as having a specific learning disability.

(1) Exclusion of Mental Retardation

(a) A score of not less than -2 standard deviations on an individual test of intelligence

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*District procedures for providing special education for exceptional students, guidelines, Vol. II pp. 2-5 learning disabilities excerpt. Tallahassee: Bureau of Education for Exceptional Students, Department of Education, 1975.

or (b) A score of 85 or above on the SIT or similar instruments or a score of not less than -2 standard deviations on the WISC or Stanford-Binet.

(2) Exclusion of blind or partially sighted

(a) Visual acuity in the better eye with best possible correction of 20/70 or better.

(3) Exclusion of Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

Auditory acuity of no more than a 30db loss in the better ear unaided, and speech and language learned through normal channels.

(4) Exclusion of Physically Handicapped

No evidence of a primary physical handicap which is directly related to the child's academic deficit.

(5) Exclusion of the Emotionally Disturbed

No evidence of a primary emotional disturbance which is so severe as to necessitate a therapeutic-affective instructional program.

(6) Evidence of an Academic Disorder

(a) Based on a students Expectancy Age (E.A.) a score in the lower 10th percentile (or 20th) in one or more of the following areas, as measured by standardized tests.

or (b) Based on a students Expectancy Age (E.A.) a score of below 70% EA (or 80% E.A.) in one or more of the following areas as measured by standardized tests.

ACADEMIC (AREAS)

(a) Reading
(b) Writing
(c) Arithmetic
(d) Spelling
(e) Pre-academic skills

(7) Evidence of a Process Disorder

(a) Based on a students Expectancy Age (E.A.) a score of less than -2 standard deviations in one area or scores of less than -1.5 standard deviations in three or more areas which measure the following basic psychological processes.

or (b) Based on a students Expectancy Age (E.A.) a score of less than 70% EA in one area or 80% EA in three or more areas which measure the following basic psychological processes.

Psychological Processes

a. Visual Processing

1. perception (discrimination and closure)
2. memory
3. association

b. Auditory Processing

1. perceptions (discrimination and closure)
2. memory
3. association

c. Haptic Processing

1. tactile
2. kinesthetic

d. Language (any meaningful communication)

1. receptive
2. expressive

e. Sensory Integration

1. visual-motor
2. visual-auditory (vocal)
3. auditory-motor
4. auditory-vocal

Expectancy Age (E.A. = $\frac{2MA + CA}{3}$)

These criteria will allow for the identification of children with specific learning disabilities. Thus the children served will represent a more homogeneous group than has previously been identified. It is this child, with severe problems, who needs special instruction. The child with a specific learning disability is not just having "problems in school" but is the child who is retarded in his functioning in a basic psychological process, while being average or above average in most areas.

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6A-6, 386 Special programs for students with specific learning disabilities.

(1) Specific learning disabilities: a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They do not include learning problems due primarily to visual, auditory or physical impairment; mental retardation; severe emotional disturbance, or environmental deprivation.

(2) Criteria for eligibility. The following criteria, consistent with the definition, shall be used to determine those students eligible to be identified as having a specific learning disability.

(a) Evidence of a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes. Based on a student's expected level of functioning (expectancy age, E.A.), a score of less than 70% EA in one area or 80% EA in three or more areas which measure the following basic psychological processes:

1. visual processing: reception, perception, memory and association.
2. auditory processing: reception, perception, memory and association.
3. haptic processing: tactile and kinesthetic.
4. language: receptive and expressive

5. sensory-integration: the expectancy age (EA) will be determined by utilizing the formula $EA = \frac{2MA + CA}{3}$

(b) Evidence of academic deficits. Based upon the student's expected level of functioning, a score of

70% EA or below 3-6 years of school attendance

60% EA or below for 7-9 years of school attendance

50% EA or below for 10 or more years of school attendance

in one or more of the following academic areas: reading, writing, arithmetic, or spelling. For children in grades K-2, evidence must be presented that the student is achieving substantially below their expected level on pre-academic tasks which require listening, thinking or speaking skills.

(c) Evidence that learning problems are not due primarily to other handicapping conditions.

1. a score of not less than minus two (-2) standard deviations on an individual test of intelligence.
2. for students with visual processing deficits, visual acuity of at least 20/70 in the better eye with best possible correction and evidence that the student's inability to perform adequately on tasks which require visual processing is not due to poor visual acuity.
3. for students with auditory processing or language deficits, auditory acuity of no more than a 30dB loss in the better ear unaided and evidence that the student's inability to perform adequately on tasks which require auditory processing or language is not due to poor auditory acuity.

4. for students with a physical impairment, evidence that their inability to perform adequately on tasks which assess the basic psychological processes is not due to the physical impairment.
5. for students who exhibit persistent and consistent severe emotional disorders, evidence that their inability to perform adequately on tasks which assess the basic psychological processes is not due to these emotional disorders.

(d) Evidence of previous educational adjustments and opportunities.

1. documented evidence which indicates that viable general educational alternatives have been attempted and found to be ineffective in meeting the student's educational needs.
2. documented evidence which indicates the students' inability to improve their performance in deficit areas by mere exposure and repetition.

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